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INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0741

UNCLAS MANAGUA 001573

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: A PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN: A LOOK AT THE 2006
LEGISLATIVE PLATFORMS

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: National Assembly candidates from FSLN, PLC, AC, ALN and MRS presented their parties, legislative priorities in a panel discussion broadcast live by Channel 10. ALN's Jamileth Bonilla emphasized poverty reduction, job creation, education and social justice, while PLC's Francisco Aguirre commented on Nicaragua's weak economy, the need for job creation, and National Assembly reform. FSLN's Bayardo Arce focused on credit and financial support for micro, small and medium enterprises to generate employment while AC's Orlando Tardencilla stressed citizen participation and the creation of a new legislative branch. Finally, MRS candidate Victor Hugo Tinoco declared his party's plans to launch an ethics and morality crusade to clean up government and cut by fifty percent the "mega salaries" of high government officials. END SUMMARY

¶2. U) On July 12, in a live broadcast from La Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), listeners of Radio Tiempo and viewers of Channel 10's "El 10 de la Nacion" heard National Assembly candidates from the Sandinista (FSLN), Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC), Alternative for Change (AC), Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN), and the Sandinista Renewal Movement (MRS) discuss their parties, legislative platforms. Despite a late start, the late arrival of the MRS candidate, a blown fuse mid-way through the AC candidate's remarks, and several miscues by the host, the event proceeded relatively smoothly. The audience was treated to a first glimpse at the nascent legislative platforms of the leading political parties. The Foro Electoral 2006 was sponsored by the Danish Embassy and co-sponsored by the Nicaraguan Chamber of Commerce (Jose Adan Aguerri, President), El Nuevo Diario (Francisco Chamorro, Deputy Director), La Universidad Centroamericana (Manuel Arauz), Radio Tiempo and Channel 10's "El 10 en la Nacion" (Jaime Arellano - host).

ALN - "You and Your Family"
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¶3. (U) ALN candidate Bonilla emphasized that:

-- Nicaragua needs a new approach to government. An important theme was "you and your family." This theme focuses on poverty reduction, employment generation, ending corruption and the pacts (called "pactos") between political parties, and improving salaries for public sector employees. The government should help provide jobs for everyone, strengthen social justice, and educate more citizens.

-- The 1980's Sandinista government destroyed the

country,s economy and economic recuperation will be very difficult.

-- Technical assistance, financing and training is necessary for producers.

-- The new government will emphasize women,s rights, including laws to protect them.

PLC - No Clear Platform

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14. (U) PLC candidate Aguirre stated that:

-- Nicaragua,s economic situation is bad: A severe housing deficit (500,000 units); large income inequalities; economic migration out of the country and a serious energy crisis are hurting the country.

-- Due to the Bolanos government,s failure, Nicaragua is becoming "Dominicanized."

-- The National Assembly must be an agent of change.

(Note: PLC candidate Aguirre did not summarize the PLC legislative agenda. His presentation was short, very general and ended quite abruptly. It is unclear whether he was unwilling or unable to present details related to the PLC agenda. End note)

FSLN - Fostering Small Business

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15. (U) FSLN candidate Arce stressed that:

-- The FSLN would promote a government of reconciliation and national unity.

-- The National Assembly needs to institutionalize dialogue with the Executive Branch and other civil institutions.

-- The FSLN will promote laws and actions to generate employment and activate production.

-- The debt carried by "producers" must be reduced.

-- The FSLN government will establish a development bank "Banco de Fomento" and state intervention should be eliminated.

-- Communal banks are required to help micro-enterprises and small businesses.

-- Banks that extend services and credit for under-served clients and areas should receive incentives.

-- The National Assembly must pass a law that guarantees credit for small and medium size businesses.

-- Employment generation is the key to reducing poverty.

-- Companies that hire recently graduated professionals should receive tax breaks.

-- The GON must pass laws that promote and provide incentives to investment in clean and renewable energy sources (ethanol, bio-diesel).

-- Incentives should be given to companies that sell and promote the use of low-energy consumption products.

-- Laws regarding health, education, environment, and international economic integration must be legislative priorities.

(Note: In sharp contrast to the PLC presentation, FSLN

candidate Arce was very well prepared. He presented a clear and detailed list of the party,s legislative priorities. End note.)

AC - Participation of Civil Society

16. (U) AC candidate Tardencilla promised to:

-- Pass a new "organic law" for the Legislative Branch stating that the GON cannot continue legislating under the current system.

-- Revise the "Law of Citizen Participation."

-- Organize the National Assembly by simplifying procedures and taking into account citizens, needs.

-- Reform the law governing control over spending of public funds so that it punishes the corrupt and prevents further corruption.

-- Create a law to measure the performance of elected National Assembly Representatives.

MRS - Fire and Brimstone

17. (U) MRS candidate Tinoco's priorities:

-- Launch an ethics and morality crusade to clean up government and improve job performance among public officials.

-- Break the political "pacto" between Aleman and Ortega.

-- Change the composition and reduce the number of representatives in the CSJ (Supreme Court) and CSE (Electoral Counsel) to break the "pacto."

-- Alter the composition of "Mesas Electorales" to guarantee greater citizen participation.

-- Cut the "mega salaries" of high government officials by 50 percent and use the savings to improve salaries of the health and education system personnel.

-- Punish corrupt officials.

-- Require MRS National Assembly deputies to donate 50 percent of their salaries to fund the purchase of school furniture and drugs and equipment for health centers.

-- Promote the generation of 500,000 jobs in the next five years.

-- Emphasize laws to promote family and small business in the tourism sector to create more jobs.

(Note: Tinoco launched into his presentation in the style of a fire and brimstone preacher talking to a roomful of sinners. His intensity and use of strong words like break,, cut,, and punish, made him appear radical relative to the other candidates. End note.)

Students Universally Critical of National Assembly

18. (U) Immediately following the presentations, the host cut to a five minute segment of live interviews with students on the UCA campus that the audience could hear by speakerphone. A Channel 10 reporter asked students what they thought of the National Assembly. The students' responses were universally negative and critical of the National Assembly. Students described the deputies as corrupt and blamed the "pactos" for Nicaragua's economic and social woes. Listening to these criticisms, the candidates chuckled and nodded and members of the audience openly laughed. (Note: There was no response -

applause, booing, etc. - from the audience at any point during the candidates' platform presentations, making it impossible to assess audience reactions. It may be that the live broadcast intimidated the audience or they did not want to disrupt the host who moved quickly from one candidate to the next. However, while the atmosphere of the live broadcast might have silenced the audience members, the students outside felt no such reservations about expressing their opinions of the National Assembly.)

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